

**SB569**  
**Correctional Services – Murder – Diminution Credits**

My name is Judith Lichtenberg. I am professor emerita of philosophy at Georgetown University. And I'm on the executive committee of the [Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform](#). Senator Alonzo Washington represents me in District 22.

More relevant today is that I've been teaching, tutoring, and mentoring at Jessup Correctional Institute, and at the DC Jail, since 2016. At Jessup I've been teaching college courses in philosophy, mostly for credit under the Second Chance Pell Grant Program through the University of Baltimore. I've taught many students with first- and second-degree murder convictions. Based on my experience, as well as on substantial empirical evidence, I strongly oppose this bill.

We know that [prison education reduces recidivism rates](#). It's not exactly rocket science: to succeed in the world outside the walls, prisoners need education and job skills. The dismal lack of those is partly what led them down the wrong path in the first place. As a 2017 [report](#) about prison education in Maryland from the Abell Foundation put it, "lower rates of recidivism and higher rates of employment and engagement are good for business, good for taxpayers, and good for communities." This bill would eliminate diminution credits for those without a high school diploma who take GED classes.

At the moment, prisoners in the Second Chance Pell Grant Program—a college program—do not receive diminution credits for their work. They enroll in these courses even without that incentive. They're hungry to learn and grow and to occupy their minds during decades of imprisonment. But the education itself changes them, helps ready them for reentry, and enables them to make a difference once they rejoin society. It's a terrible waste of human resources not to do everything we can to encourage prisoners to further their education. And for that diminution credits are an important tool.

Under this bill prisoners would also not receive diminution credits for the jobs they work in—in the kitchen, the sewing shop, and sanitation services. Those who have these jobs are most often people who want to change themselves and lead a better life. Refusing them diminution credits could reduce their incentive to better themselves and their hope of ever going home. As one longtime prisoner told me, it would make prisons more dangerous for staff and residents both.

I urge you to give an unfavorable report to SB569.

Sincerely,

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